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AUSTRALIA'S SECOND PARLIAMENT.

BY HUGH H. LUSK.

THE elections that have been recently concluded for the second Parliament of Australia have developed features of far more than local interest. There were many reasons why this was likely to be the case, some of them local, and others connected with the questions at present occupying so largely the attention of both the Mother Country and her greater colonies. Among the more local questions the chief was, beyond all doubt, what is known in Australia as "the Labor Question." Among the more general questions, Protection and Free Trade, mainly in their bearing on the policy advocated by Mr. Chamberlain, and the attitude the colony should take up on that policy, overshadowed every other issue. Other questions, of less moment, were found in the effect produced by the grant of equal electoral privileges to women, and by the attempts made, in a good many localities, on the part of the women to take full advantage of the concession, by offering themselves as candidates for election both to the Senate and to the Representative Chamber of the Federal Legislature.

The general result of the elections was wholly unexpected by any one. The first Federal Parliament contained three parties, it is true; but the Government, which stood for protection, and the Opposition, which stood for a tariff for revenue only, formed an overwhelming majority of its members. In the Representative Chamber, the party of protection was considerably the stronger, indeed it gave the Government a fair working majority of fourteen votes over the Opposition: in the Senate, however, the Government and Opposition parties were almost exactly balanced, and the three Labor members gave the preponderance now to one side and now to the other. The skill in Parliamentary management, and certainly the debating power, in both Chambers lay

with the Opposition; and while the vacillation of the Barton Cabinet on many subjects did not actually lead to defeat in the House, it certainly left a strong impression on the mind of the country that the days of the Cabinet would be numbered as soon as the appeal to the constituencies came. The general opinion of all parties was, that the Free Trade party would come back with a majority sufficient to enable it to overturn the Cabinet, and to modify the protectionist tariff which had been enacted. The result of the elections has been to disappoint all expectations.

What has happened has been a victory for the Labor party, throughout the Commonwealth, such as leaves the position of both Government and Opposition difficult, and almost ridiculous. Of the thirty-six members constituting the Senate, there are now only eight who are pronounced protectionists and supporters of the Government. There are fourteen members representing the Opposition party, and the same number who belong to the party of Labor, so that either of those parties can command nearly double as many votes as the Ministry of the day. In the House, the position is almost equally embarrassing. The Government, or Protectionist party, has secured twenty-six seats out of seventy-six; while the Opposition has twenty-seven, and the party of Labor twenty-three. The present Ministry, therefore, stands in a minority in each of the Chambers. Should it ever happen—as in certain exceptional circumstances it might, under the terms of the Constitution—that the members of both Chambers sat and voted together, the Opposition could command forty-one votes, the Labor party thirty-seven, and the Government only thirty-four.

The situation, as will be readily understood, is an embarrassing one to both Government and Opposition. By all the rules which in England have governed Parliamentary responsible government, the Cabinet should at once resign and lay down the task which it has no longer the power to carry out. Should the Cabinet resign to-morrow, however, the Opposition would find itself almost equally powerless to carry on the government, without relying on the support of members whose allegiance is due to one or other of the parties disagreeing with their general policy. It is, of course, equally clear that the Labor party could not undertake the task with even the smallest hope of success; so that the result would seem to be something very like a deadlock.

Only two courses would seem to be open to the present Cabinet. One, and certainly the one most accordant with precedent, would be that of resigning office, as it is clear from the result of the elections that it has not the confidence of a majority of the constituents. The other course, for which in the peculiar circumstances of the case many excuses may be found, would be to endeavor to make an alliance, more or less formal, with the Labor party by which some at least of the measures of that party may be passed, and the Cabinet guaranteed against defeat in a want-of-confidence motion, should one be moved by the Opposition. The objections to this way of meeting the crisis are many, it is true; and yet there would seem to be little doubt that it is the course most likely to commend itself to Mr. Deakin's Cabinet. The leading objection is, that any such alliance could only be secured at a price, and that price one which would lend more or less sanction to views which are almost openly socialistic in their tendency. More than once in the last session of the last Parliament, the Government was saved from defeat by the help of the Labor party, then much less powerful than now; and in every case the assistance was followed by some concession of an important kind to the wishes of the Labor leaders. It cannot be doubted that now, holding, as they do, the key of the political situation in their hands, the terms of any such assistance would be very much more stringent and far-reaching.

It may be urged, and indeed it is already urged by that portion of the press which supports the Government and its protectionist policy, that the Deakin Cabinet, being in office, and seeing clearly that no single party in the Federal Parliament, as now constituted, can command a majority except by some compromise of this kind, is only doing its duty to the Commonwealth by retaining office on these terms. The answer of the Opposition is, that in case of a resignation, it would be for the Opposition, if anybody, to make such a compromise, which that party could do the more easily because the alternative could be made a dissolution of the newly elected Parliament, so far as the Representative Chamber is concerned—an alternative clearly not at the disposal of the Cabinet in office. There can be little doubt, indeed, that if it must come to a bargain between the Government in office and the party of Labor, a Cabinet formed by the present Opposition would have a very great advantage over any other. The difference

in strength—except, of course, in the Senate—between the parties is almost nominal; but, in the possession of the power to send back the newly elected representatives to their constituencies for re-election, the Opposition would hold a very strong card indeed; one which would count for much with the Labor members.

The causes that have led to the present position of affairs throughout the States of the Commonwealth are somewhat peculiar. Three months ago, those who were supposed to be best informed on the subject were prepared to prophesy a great defeat at the polls for the Government and its policy of high protection, and all the indications seemed to favor the idea that the Free Trade party in Opposition would be the party to profit by the change of public opinion. The result of the election has shown a defeat for the Government, and by implication for its policy, but the Opposition has not been the chief beneficiary. The principal reason of this unexpected result has been—though this is not generally appreciated, even in Australia, as yet—the fiscal agitation set on foot by Mr. Chamberlain. That gave Mr. Deakin his opportunity for turning the flank of the Opposition—an opportunity which he seized and made the most of. Before the last session of the late Parliament expired, he was able to announce a policy for the protectionist party which fell in with what were understood to be Mr. Chamberlain's views, without interfering with the fiscal settlement arrived at as the result of nearly a year of struggle in the first session. The plan which he outlined was, in effect, the same as that carried through the New Zealand Parliament, except that it went a good deal farther, and applied to a very much larger number of classes of goods than were affected in New Zealand. In promising to bring in a measure to carry out this policy in case his party was returned with a majority at the election, he arrayed behind him not only the protectionists of Victoria on whom he mainly relied, but the large body of voters throughout all the States who are influenced by a strong sentiment of Imperialism. He also placed the Free Trade Opposition in the difficult position of appearing to oppose any suggestion of falling in with a policy of preference for commercial purposes within the Empire. The leader of the Opposition, indeed, declared his readiness to support a system of favored-nation treatment for the Mother Country, as long as it took the shape of reducing duties now imposed on British, in common with foreign, goods, and not

of adding duties in the case of foreign-made ones. The answer was not a success, because it was easily made to appear to be a trick which professed to do something for English interests which it neither would nor could do. The experience of many months of struggle, during which trade was disorganized owing to doubts respecting the shape which the Federal tariff was likely to take, has made the majority of Australians shrink from a reopening of the question, and the Government proposals seemed to avoid this.

In this sense, and to this extent, the contest now going on in England was a serious factor in the Commonwealth elections just concluded. The name of Mr. Chamberlain, more than that of any other English statesman of the day, is a name to conjure with in Australasia; and any proposals advocated by him are at present certain of large support from Australian voters. When to this was added the sentiment aroused in favor of Imperialism by the events of the last three years, it is not wonderful that very many voters shrank from taking an active part in the elections that might tend to defeat the plans of so popular a man as the former Secretary for the Colonies, and to strike a serious blow at the inter-State preferential trade of which he is the advocate. There is no other possible way of accounting for the disappointment which has attended the Free Trade party in New South Wales, which is, as it always has been, the headquarters of the faith in Australia; and what is true of the Mother Colony of the group is true in its degree of all the other States. The evidence that such was the case may be found in the fact that, had the party of Free Trade polled anything like its full strength in New South Wales, it would have swept the State, and returned to the Representative Chamber certainly not less than twenty-three out of the twenty-seven members it sends to the Federal Parliament. Instead of doing this, it only succeeded in returning sixteen, the balance of seven going to the party of Labor. The same result, or very nearly the same, was reached in each of the States, with the single exception of Victoria, where the protectionist policy is naturally in the ascendant. In every instance, the Free Trade candidates received much less support than was expected.

The party which has profited by this peculiar effect of Mr. Chamberlain's great fiscal agitation has not been, however, the party in office, but the party of Labor. The result of the dissatisfaction of Free-Traders with the attitude of their leaders on

the question of Imperial Preference did not take the form of making them vote for Labor candidates, but it did keep them from voting at all, with the result that many of the seats were obtained by candidates who were unable to poll more than a fourth part of the electors on the rolls. It may be said, indeed, that the party has succeeded best which best deserved success, because it was the one which worked for success most intelligently and enthusiastically. While the Government party was much discredited by its weak administration during its two years of office, and the Opposition was out of touch with the prevailing sentiment of the community by its thinly veiled opposition to preferential trade within the Empire, the party of Labor suffered from no drawback in either direction. In its manipulation of the Cabinet in power, it had been very successful, having secured many concessions in favor of its own views, especially in the direction of exemptions from duties likely to affect the workers, and in this it had both consolidated its own ranks and gained the respect of others. Its strongest point, however, was that it had made no pronouncement on the subject of preferential trade, so that any candidate from its ranks was at liberty to give an entire assent to the views of Mr. Chamberlain. Many, indeed most of them, did so; and it is far from unlikely that in this way they disarmed the opposition of not a few Free-Traders, even if they did not actually gain their support.

The elections were the first to test the effect of the new law which gave the same electoral rights to both sexes for all Federal purposes. Women had, indeed, voted at the elections for the first Parliament in South Australia, owing to the fact that they already possessed the franchise in that State according to the old colonial law; but the population is not large, and the circumstances made it difficult to form an estimate as to the general effect of the law. At the recent elections the privilege was enjoyed by women in all the States; and, owing to its novelty, the effects were closely observed. Two things may be said to stand out as results: one, that the tendency is for the female electors to take an active part in the contest; the other, that they usually voted very much on the same lines as their male relations, and so produced no marked change in the position of parties. If there is any definite change in this respect, it is that the women's vote seems rather to have strengthened the hands of the Labor party. This can be

readily understood from the fact, that every one of the planks laid down in the Labor platform aimed at a direct and practical economic advantage for the working classes, and therefore seemed to hold out a promise of betterment to all who belong to those classes. The same cannot, of course, be said—at any rate, with anything like the same certainty—of the principles of either Protection or Free Trade. If these are not too much in the nature of theoretical reasonings to appeal to the average feminine mind, it may be said truly that they appeal less directly to it, and with much less force. As a matter of fact, it was found that the wives and daughters of the workers were hardly, if at all, less enthusiastic politicians than their husbands and fathers, and could be relied on to vote, and to urge others to vote, while the female voters of other classes were largely conspicuous by their absence from the polls, or for their apparent indifference to the results arrived at.

Unlike New Zealand, the Commonwealth has given its women, not only the full right of voting, but also of holding a seat in either Chamber of the Federal Legislature, and there were not wanting ladies who were ambitious to take advantage of the new privilege. In nearly all the States, there were female candidates for seats in the Representative Chamber; and in two, at least, women courted election as Senators to represent the whole State. The attempt seems to have been a little in advance of public sentiment. For the Senate, neither of the female candidates took even a respectable place at the polls; and, even in the case of the House, they were easily beaten by nearly all their male competitors. The fact that in no case whatever was any female candidate selected by any one of the three parties among whom the public was divided, may account for this apparently rather ungallant result. The course of New Zealand, whose example has been closely followed in many respects of late years in the legislation of Australia, has been far more cautious and conservative in this respect; and it appears likely that, after all, it will result more satisfactorily, even from the standpoint of feminine political ambition. In the island colony, the franchise was granted to women ten years ago, but the right to be elected to seats in the Legislature was withheld. After ten years' experience, if the women voters of New Zealand really wished the further privilege of becoming legislators in their own persons, it is certain they

could have the law altered without difficulty. Were such a change made, it may be looked on as a certainty that there would be little or no prejudice in New Zealand against the idea of female candidates, and some, at least, would be sure of election.

The general result of the elections must, as has already been said, be considered a great victory for the party of Labor. That victory, however, is not likely to lead to any immediately sensational changes either in legislation or in administration. An alliance between the present Cabinet and the leaders of the Labor party is more than probable; but it will not take the form to any extent of a coalition. The Government will still propound its own policy; and, so far as it deals with such questions as preference for British goods, it will obtain enough support from Labor members to carry it through, at least in its general features. The alliance will be sufficiently strong to keep the Free Trade party out of office and the Protectionist minority in office, and the price will be the acceptance by the Cabinet of two or three of the planks of the Labor platform as measures of its own. Most of the planks in the Labor platform, it is true, are subjects for State rather than Federal legislation; but some—such as an Act to prevent monopolies, a national system of irrigation, embracing the vesting of the frontages in the Federal Government instead of the States, and the establishment of a National Bank—seem to be within its reach, and may be the first steps in an effort destined to carry the Commonwealth far on the road to State socialism. One thing would appear almost certain from the indications of the elections for Australia's second Parliament: this is, that the party of Labor is for the present the coming party. If its leaders are wise and moderate in this Parliament, the chances are that they will enter the next with so large a following as would justify them in making a bid for office. What they will want most, in that case, is a man to lead them. With a leader as able and adroit as the Premier of New Zealand has proved himself during ten years of office, the way is open in the Commonwealth for experiments in social legislation more radical than any attempted in New Zealand by Mr. Seddon and his party.

HUGH H. LUSK.